SOVIETS USE FOOD AS A WEAPON

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To the benevolence which the USSR professes toward Asiatic peoples generally there is one outstanding exception: democratic and prosperous Japan. The USSR apparently finds it intolerable that an Asiatic country should have a responsible, popularly chosen government and enjoy thriving trade relations with the West. To the Sino-Soviet Bloc, booming post-war Japan is a dangerous example to the underdeveloped countries of Asia, illustrating as it does the fact that it is not necessary to accept the economic and political restrictions of the Communist system in order to prosper.

In recent months the Soviets have used every available weapon to attack the government of Liberal-Democratic Premier Nobusuke Kishi. They have not hesitated to use the fishing industry, one of the principal sources of the Japanese food supply and an important item in its export trade with the west, in their efforts to bring down the present Cabinet.

Annual negotiations on the Soviet-Japanese fishery treaty began 12 January and are still continuing. The original treaty, signed in 1956, concerned the northwestern Pacific Ocean, including the Japan Sea, the Sea of Okhotsk, and the Bering Sea. It set up restrictions in areas, catch quotas, types of fish to be taken, and methods of fishing. It also set up a joint Commission to meet annually, consider the measures which are being enforced and, if necessary, amend them.

The current meeting of the Commission was preceded by a violent Soviet propaganda attack. Soviet broadcasts accused the Japanese of violating the fishing treaty provisions and threatened stiffer penalties for Japanese fishermen caught within Russia's claimed territorial waters. A broadcast on 8 January alleging serious deterioration of fish and crab supplies due to Japanese disregard of the treaty provisions presaged an attempt on the part of the Soviets to restrict Japanese fishing opportunities still further.

Consideration of the whole question of recent Japanese foreign relations, however, suggests that the Soviets are less concerned with the protection of Pacific fish supplies than with disrupting amicable relations between Japan and the West. If the Kishi government is forced to agree to more severe limits for Japanese fishermen, it may face serious popular reaction. Over a quarter of a million Japanese are estimated to be engaged in fishing. Principally small independent operators, they handle over five

million tons annually, of which almost two million tons were exported in 1956. Any serious dislocation of the industry, Japan's principal one after iron and steel products and textiles, could put the government in a difficult situation.

On previous occasions the Soviets have used the annual meetings of the Commission to further their political aims. This year it appears that they are attempting to create dissatisfaction with the Kishi government's handling of this question and link it with their own propaganda campaign against him. To date, the Soviet efforts have only angered the Japanese without noticeably affecting Kishi.

Soviet Ambassador Federenko has informed the Japanese that the USSR would not negotiate "pending issues" until a formal peace treaty is signed. However, there have been implications that concessions would be made if the Japanese Government took a more "neutral" stand. In this context the stiffening Soviet attitude toward the fishery treaty appears to be nothing more than a cold-blooded attempt to exert pressure on the government by threatening to reduce one of the principal items in the Japanese diet. Ultimately, of course, the Soviets hope to neutralize and isolate Japan from the free world and to rid themselves of the constant irritation of a nation devoted to free enterprise and popular government on the Far Eastern threshhold of the Communist Bloc.